

The President's Daily Brief

26 March 1970

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Hanoi has come out strongly in support of Sihanouk's call for an uprising against the new government in Phnom Penh. (Page 1)

In Laos, the government has sent significant numbers of reinforcements to Long Tieng in expectation of a major enemy assault. [redacted]

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(Page 2)

Numerous documents captured recently in South Vietnam emphasize directives to Communist forces there to concentrate on guerrilla warfare and political subversion, rather than on large combat actions.

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[redacted] In Lebanon, there have been serious incidents between the fedayeen and elements of the security forces and the civilian population. (Page 4)

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West German emissary Egon Bahr has briefed the Allied ambassadors in Bonn on his second round of talks in Moscow; meanwhile, Chancellor Brandt faces growing opposition to his Eastern policy. (Page 5)

In the Dominican Republic, negotiations for the release of the US air attaché, Lt. Col. Crowley, have temporarily broken down. (Page 6)

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NORTH VIETNAM - CAMBODIA

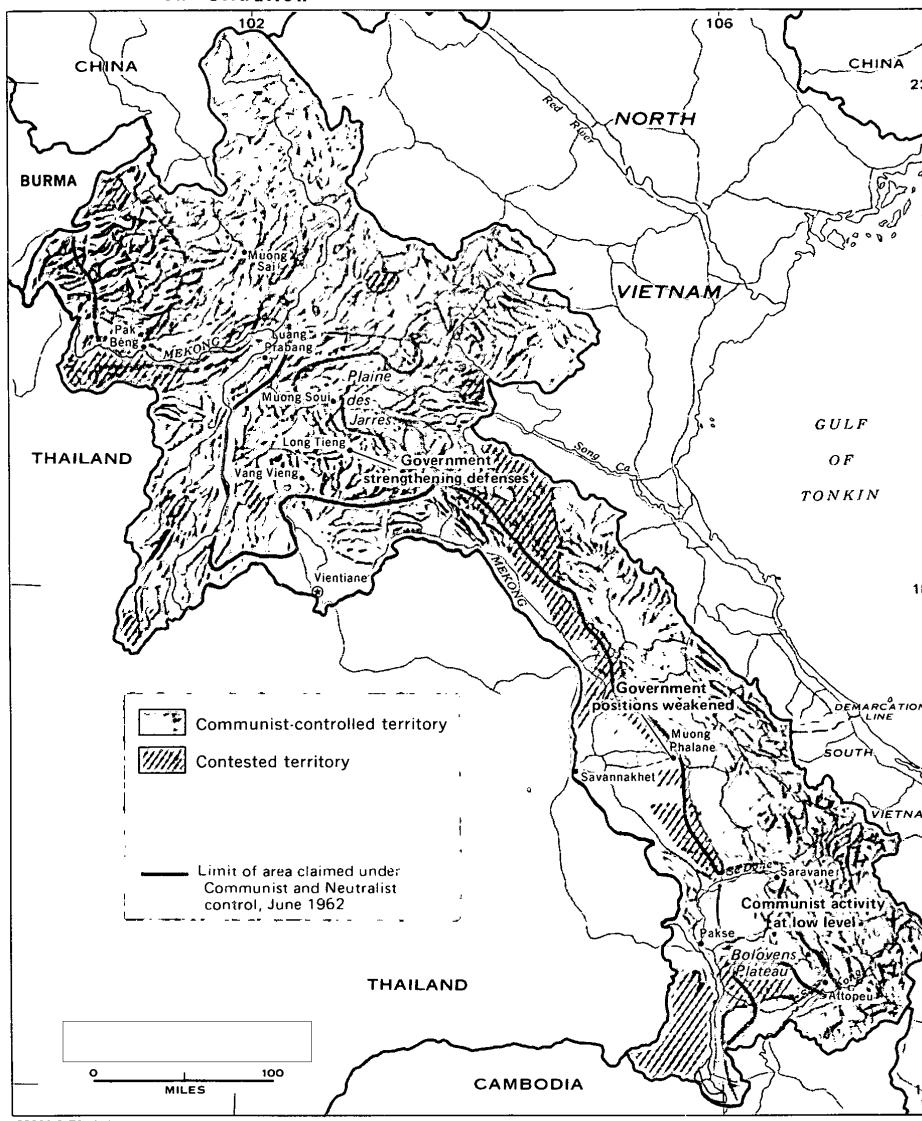
A North Vietnamese Government communiqué yesterday declared "total support" for Sihanouk's call of 23 March for an uprising against the new government in Phnom Penh. In addition, both Hanoi and the South Vietnamese Communists apparently are proceeding with plans to withdraw most, if not all, of their diplomatic personnel from Phnom Penh.

These moves leave little doubt that Hanoi is relying on intimidation--by bluster if possible but by force if necessary--as the best way to handle the Cambodians. By their actions, the Communists have tightened the screws in the face of demands from Phnom Penh for a continuation of talks on Vietnamese-Cambodian issues.

Available evidence indicates that the Communists still hope to avoid a resort to force. They almost certainly are willing, however, to take military action, while concealing their activities under the guise of a "liberation movement," if they believe their vital interests in Cambodia are endangered.

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Laos: Current Situation



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LAOS

The Long Tieng defense force has been strengthened significantly in anticipation of a major assault. Continued reinforcement has raised to 3,400 the number of troops in the immediate area. Communications intelligence indicates that North Vietnamese units near the airstrip, having failed in their initial attempts to break through the defenses, are now working on improving the accuracy of their 122-mm. rockets.

The only significant ground action in the area yesterday occurred some six miles north of the base where a 300-man North Vietnamese force attacked a newly occupied government position. Government troops suffered relatively heavy casualties in the engagement, but the North Vietnamese were pushed back.

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In the central portion of the panhandle, meanwhile, Communist forces have not yet attempted to take advantage of the government's weakened forces near Muong Phalane. Two government battalions, which had been successful in keeping enemy forces in this area off balance, were recently airlifted to Long Tieng.

Farther south, in the Bolovens Plateau, Communist forces have been unusually inactive so far this dry season, possibly because of problems with their allies. A recently intercepted enemy message disclosed that North Vietnamese forces had withdrawn from their positions near Saravane because of friction with Pathet Lao units.

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SOUTH VIETNAM

A pattern has been emerging in enemy documents captured in the past several weeks which leads us to conclude that Communist forces in many areas of South Vietnam have been directed to concentrate on guerrilla warfare and political subversion, rather than on large combat actions. Numerous captured documents indicate that the aim is to avoid heavy losses, ease supply problems, build up weakened local forces, and provide greater protection for the Communist political apparatus.

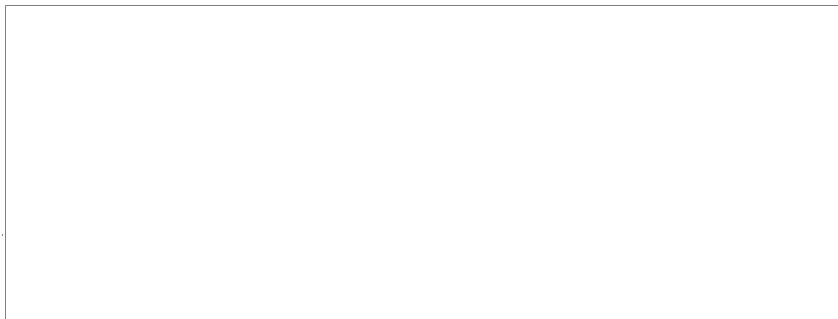
We noted the beginnings of this change in tactics in late 1969, when the enemy gave up coordinated but brief countrywide assaults and started to emphasize lesser campaigns.

The captured documents support other indications that the enemy plans to maintain such tactics for some time to come. In a strategic sense, the plan is designed to strengthen Communist capabilities for protracted military operations, and to keep Communist forces in South Vietnam in a condition which would permit them to take advantage of any favorable opportunities for large-scale actions.

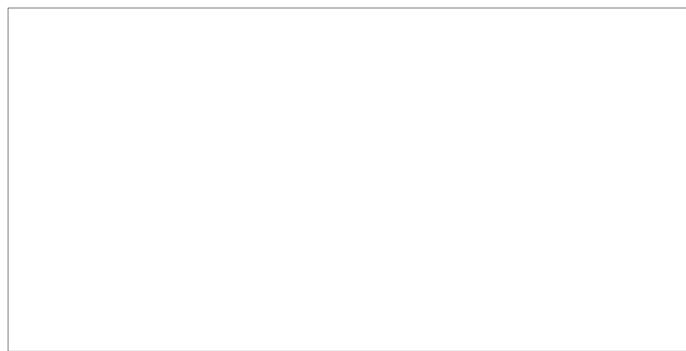
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MIDDLE EAST



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There were serious incidents yesterday between Palestinian commandos and Lebanese civilians and troops. The first clash involved residents of a Christian village five miles southeast of Beirut and fedayeen from a refugee camp. The Lebanese Army moved tanks into the area to stop the fighting. Another clash occurred at a refugee camp north of Beirut, where commandos seized the son of Pierre al-Jummayyil, leader of the far-right Christian Phalanges Party. Fighting broke out between fedayeen and Phalangists, and the latter are said to have mobilized their para-military forces.

The Lebanese cabinet met in emergency session to discuss ways to prevent a repetition of the violence that occurred last fall between the fedayeen and Lebanese security forces. A spread of belligerency could lead to a crisis between Lebanese Muslims, most of whom support the fedayeen strongly, and Lebanese Christians, who want the fedayeen restrained in order to prevent Israeli retaliation.

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WEST GERMANY - USSR

Egon Bahr, the West German special emissary to Moscow, has confirmed in a briefing of the three Allied ambassadors in Bonn that he made no significant progress on issues which divide the two sides during his second round of talks with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko. The West German charge d'affaires in Moscow agreed, but in his briefing also told Ambassador Beam that both sides had recognized the possibility of rapprochement in the future on certain points.

Bahr said no documents had been exchanged with the Soviets concerning negotiations on renouncing the use of force, and neither side considered itself under any pressure. No date has been set for a resumption of the talks, but the West Germans want it to be prior to the Brandt-Stoph meeting in Kassel set for 21 May.

Bahr also commented on the opening today of the quadripartite talks on Berlin, saying he was most interested in aiming for agreements guaranteeing the viability of West Berlin and free access to the city, unhampered by the East Germans.

Bahr's comment about feeling no pressure seems somewhat disingenuous. Rainer Barzel, a leader of the opposition in Bonn, has indicated that his party, the Christian Democrats, will strongly oppose the continuation of these talks. In a conversation with Ambassador Rush in Bonn, Barzel predicted that if the government continued on its present course, his party would bring it down with charges of appeasement.

Barzel appealed for the Allies to draw the line on Chancellor Brandt's Eastern policy. He probably hopes that the US will express reservations during Brandt's forthcoming visit to Washington. Although he has advocated negotiation with the East in the past, he now professes fear that the government, in its desire for an agreement, will capitulate totally to the Soviet viewpoint.

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DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Negotiations for the release of Lt. Col. Crowley temporarily broke down last night. An agreement in substance for an exchange, achieved through the intermediary efforts of a three-member commission headed by the Santo Domingo archbishop, dissolved when the parties could not settle on details for the trade. The exact timing of the US air attaché's release appears to be the stumbling block, with the government insisting on a near-simultaneous exchange and the terrorists demanding that the prisoners depart before the attaché is freed.

The 20 political prisoners held by the government were scheduled to be flown to Mexico last night, but the plane departed without them. The kidnapers repeated their public warning that the government must bear the responsibility for its actions. The archbishop expects negotiations to resume today.

Despite the turmoil arising from the kidnapping, President Balaguer went ahead with his announcement that he will seek a second term in the elections of 16 May. In an attempt to head off opposition allegations that he will not provide free elections, Balaguer declared that he will hand over the presidency to the Supreme Court president during his campaign. Balaguer's long-awaited declaration is expected to generate protests. The military, however, as a result of the President's uncompromising refusal to bow to the original demands of the kidnapers and release the prisoners in the country, is probably more strongly united than ever behind Balaguer. Security forces can be expected to deal aggressively with any disturbances.

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